



# Criminal Division

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\*Mr. Wray frequently speaks from notes and may depart from the speech as prepared.

Thank you for that kind introduction. Looking around this room, it's just amazing how far this initiative has come since the Spring of 2001. It's hard to believe that it was just three years ago that the President and Attorney General announced the creation of Project Safe Neighborhoods in Philadelphia. There, this Administration affirmed its commitment to protect the American people from gun-wielding criminals. We vowed to prosecute aggressively and relentlessly those who threaten the safety of our communities. And we pledged to prevent the senseless loss of life that often accompanies the illegal use of guns.

For three years now, the U.S. Attorneys, state prosecutors, local and federal law enforcement, and other PSN partners and community members across America have worked together to make Project Safe Neighborhoods a success. You've prosecuted America's most violent offenders and put them behind bars where they can't offend again. You've made good on the President's and Attorney General's promise that "gun crime means hard time."

Your vigilance on the streets and your hard work in court are paying off: Gun criminals are being held accountable for their actions. They no longer believe that they can violate our country's gun laws with impunity. They can no longer hope to slip through the cracks. Word of your efforts has spread. In communities across America, law-abiding citizens and the violent criminals who prey upon them know that we're united and determined to defend American lives. They know that violent offenders will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. They know that we are firmly resolved to rid our neighborhoods of the scourge of gun crime.

You've also done far more than simply prosecute offenders. As part of your PSN efforts, you've implemented effective prevention and deterrence measures that help stop gun crime before it happens. You've reached out to the residents of hard-hit communities and recruited their help in reclaiming their neighborhoods. You've shown at-risk youth that there are alternatives to a life of crime. You've created roll-call training for police officers and classes on federal firearms laws for local prosecutors. You've served as mentors to offenders who are re-entering the community. You've worked side-by-side with your local researchers to identify your most significant gun crime problems and created strategic interventions in response. Bottom line: Through all of your various efforts, you have literally saved lives.

The breadth of your efforts is one of Project Safe Neighborhoods' greatest strengths: We're taking a comprehensive approach to take back our streets and set the course of America's future. But if I had to identify one aspect of this program that

makes it truly successful, it is the fact that each of your districts has tailored the initiative to respond to the specific gun crime problems in your own communities. Although Project Safe Neighborhoods is unquestionably a national program, it gives each local jurisdiction the flexibility to craft a unique approach that meets its own particular needs. The result is that no two PSN initiatives are precisely the same. Thus, 94 individual laboratories across the country are each experimenting with their own approaches to gun crime.

Not all of these approaches will meet with immediate success. But as your experiments progress, we're learning how to overcome the obstacles and move forward. And although each PSN program is different, we're confronting many common issues in implementation. By sharing information and best practices, districts that have successfully overcome challenges can help those districts that continue to grapple with them. We are and must continue learning from one another.

The innovations emerging from these local laboratories reflect the full spectrum of gun crime problems and implementation challenges. Some novel approaches are straightforward and relatively easy to implement, like creating local newsletters and websites or hosting outreach barbecues. Other innovations are more complex, such as full-scale coordination of the PSN and Weed & Seed initiatives, and offender re-entry programs that involve law enforcement, social services, and the faith community. In great part, Project Safe Neighborhoods is built on innovation and strategy, and implementing those innovations is on a daily basis achieving our goal of a safer America.

One way in which Project Safe Neighborhoods helps us achieve that goal is through our focused leveraging of the power of federal law. Every district has established a screening mechanism, so that the most dangerous and violent offenders are generally prosecuted in federal court. In some districts, ATF agents make the first set of recommendations. In others, a trained local police officer gathers cases that may be appropriate for federal prosecution. And in still others, task forces meet in person to discuss cases.

Take, for example, the PSN Task Force in the Western District of Tennessee. Not content to start small, they set their sights on reviewing, on a weekly basis, *every* arrest in Memphis in which a gun or ammunition was recovered. That way, they could be sure that no worthy case fell through the cracks. Skeptics predicted that there would be too many cases for the task force to handle and that local agencies would not have the time to meet and discuss every case, much less prepare a comprehensive review packet

listing the defendant's criminal history and possible triggers for federal jurisdiction. But the PSN team persevered. They tackled the additional work and made time for the weekly review meetings.

And their perseverance is paying off. In the two-and-a-half years that the Memphis program has been up and running, the group has reviewed 3,645 arrest tickets – an average of 28 a week. They have accepted 938 cases into the PSN pipeline, 395 of which have been indicted in federal court so far. 135 other defendants have accepted above-range plea offers in state court in order to avoid federal prosecution. Since the creation of Project Safe Neighborhoods, federal prosecutions of gun crime in the district have increased over 400%, and almost 99% of convicted firearms defendants have been sentenced to some time in federal prison.

These statistics are impressive, but they don't tell the whole story. Because of the care and time devoted by the Memphis task force to reviewing every individual case and targeting select defendants, these prosecution and conviction statistics include many of that city's most dangerous criminals. In other words, both the quantity and the quality of our prosecutions and convictions have increased.

To take just one example, consider the case of a sexual predator with multiple sexual assault and rape convictions – including one for the rape of a twelve-year-old – who had never been sentenced to any significant jail time for those crimes. The local police knew he was a bad character, but time and time again were forced to see him released onto the streets to continue to prey on women and children. Project Safe Neighborhoods changed all that. When he was arrested with two bullets in his pocket and his case was reviewed by the PSN Task Force, the Memphis Police were there to give context to the otherwise unremarkable facts on the arrest ticket. The U.S. Attorney's Office adopted his case. As a result of his criminal history, those two bullets earned him 24 years in federal prison – more time than he had served on all of his prior rape and assault convictions combined. He was taken off the streets and put behind bars where he couldn't harm another woman or child. Without the Memphis task force's commitment to review every single case, he might have escaped significant punishment again. Because of their efforts, Memphis is a safer place to live and work today.

In a time when we all face resource constraints and are asked to do more with less, the experiences of this and many other PSN task forces in this room illustrate to all of us that, with a dedicated team, you can have a huge impact on our neighborhoods.

We can also find inspiration in the heroic efforts of other PSN task forces with comprehensive screening systems, such as the District of Nevada, where the number of federal gun prosecutions has increased by approximately 160% since PSN's creation; the Eastern District of Virginia, which indicted over 450 defendants last year; and the District of Utah, which indicted nearly 400 defendants last year alone. These are just a few examples, which prove that such great strides are made only through hard work and dedication that we all admire.

Partnerships work both ways, and it's important to remember that it is not always the federal prosecutor who wins the conviction for which the task force works so hard. In a recent case out of Salt Lake City, for example, a PSN local prosecutor saved the day. Two defendants were picked up in possession of stolen firearms, and local police referred them immediately for federal prosecution based on intelligence that they were very active in local gangs. When evidentiary problems arose in the federal case, a local prosecutor and PSN partner offered to help. He was able to transfer the case to state court, where the defendants were successfully convicted of state firearm felonies. The spirit of cooperation in Utah's PSN initiative reminds us that what matters is that justice is done – regardless of the courtroom in which it is served.

Partnerships like these form the foundation of local PSN programs. Such collaboration and cooperation are crucial because they enable law enforcement officers, researchers, and prosecutors to leverage each other's knowledge about offenders and criminal activity in our communities. One technique for sharing information, the crime incident review, provides a unique opportunity for local, state, and federal law enforcement to share street-level information about crime in a targeted community. During these meetings, representatives from across the criminal justice system work together to identify patterns in criminal behavior by sharing information about known offenders or geographic "hot spots." The patterns reveal themselves when participants recognize familiar and recurring names, locations, or weapons. Just a few minutes spent reviewing a single case can provide a wealth of valuable information. In addition to learning about the overall picture of violent crime in an area, investigators develop leads in individual cases and identify connections between cases that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Many of you have had the opportunity to hear from our friends in Rochester, New York, where crime incident reviews have been used to examine homicide cases since 2000. In Rochester and other places around the country like Indianapolis, New Haven, Albuquerque, and High Point, North Carolina, our colleagues have broken down the barriers to open communication. They've demonstrated that everyone benefits when we

collaborate, and that an informed criminal justice system is an effective one. When agencies gather to exchange valuable intelligence, the communities we serve are better for it.

Of course, deterring crime is at least as important to the safety and welfare of our citizens as prosecuting it after the fact. Recognizing this, you've spread word of PSN's resolve to root out gun crime, taking your message directly to at-risk populations. You've brought creativity to this work, putting your message in all sorts of novel places, like on the back of headrests in police cruisers. You've engaged the community by hosting PSN picnics and barbecues. You've talked to school groups, church congregations, and the press. As a result, nearly every jurisdiction has a story about a defendant who begs not to be "Exiled," or about agents who hear over a wiretap that guns are no good anymore because "the feds are handing out 5 to 7 like candy." These stories tell us that our outreach efforts are bearing fruit; the criminal element is getting the message of "hard time for gun crime."

PSN programs also help prevent crime by creating and supporting re-entry programs that help former offenders transition back into our neighborhoods and become productive members of society. In last January's State of the Union address, the President said, "We know from long experience that if [offenders] can't find work, or a home, or help, they are much more likely to commit crime and return to prison." Re-entry programs help stop this cycle by providing alternatives to a life of crime. We won't be able to reach all criminals, but we've got to be ready to help those who have done their time and are ready to make a change in their lives.

Look at our PSN partners in Boston, who've instituted the Boston Re-Entry Initiative. Participants are chosen by gang-intelligence officers through a review of their criminal histories. Six months before their scheduled release date, these offenders are required to attend a monthly forum to hear from community leaders, former offenders, law enforcement officers and prosecutors, all of whom stress the importance of changing their behavior when they are released. In addition to this strong enforcement message, the offenders are offered social services, employment and housing assistance, child support information, and substance abuse resources. Preliminary reviews of the program say that offenders are paying attention and that our efforts are paying off.

Boston's is just one example of the excellent re-entry programs in many of your communities. PSN task forces in Indianapolis, St. Louis, Albuquerque, and Winston-Salem have also taken advantage of such programs to help prevent gun crime. If your

district has such a program, I urge you to make it a part of your PSN efforts. If you don't have one, consider using your PSN partnerships to create one. As the President said in the State of the Union, "America is the land of second chance, and when the gates of the prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life." Project Safe Neighborhoods can help smooth that path.

At the national level, Project Safe Neighborhoods has launched a successful outreach and deterrence campaign. In partnership with the National Crime Prevention Council, the Ad Council, and Mullen, a Boston-based ad agency, we created a campaign that focused on the pain that gun crime causes families. It uses the tag "Gun Crimes Hit Home." We've produced four television ads under that campaign that have aired almost 12,000 times across the country. The networks have donated almost one million dollars' worth of airtime to carry the ads, not including the airtime given by cable providers.

Today, I'm proud to announce a new, additional, PSN public service ad campaign. In response to requests from several of your districts, we have created new print and radio ads that target the problem of domestic violence and firearms. Several of you rightly noted that the national ad campaign I just mentioned – the "Gun Crimes Hit Home" TV ads – plays well in urban areas, but does not address the needs of rural communities, where domestic violence is often the most significant gun violence issue. With your crucial input and assistance, these new ads warn domestic violence offenders that they can't possess a gun under federal law.

These powerful ads will complement the more urban-oriented national spots and could not have been created without your feedback. Far better than anyone in Washington, you know best how we can assist you, and I encourage you to let us know what more we can do. I also encourage you to tell us about your successes and your challenges; your stories may help another district facing the same issues. Tell us what's worked and what hasn't. Our ability to guide this program and to support you depends heavily on your feedback.

I firmly believe that Project Safe Neighborhoods represents a model approach for addressing crime in our communities. But ideas alone don't bring about change. We also need people with tremendous energy and creativity; who are skilled at working with and inspiring others; who dedicate themselves to finding solutions to the problems we collectively face; who vow to themselves, "before I leave this neighborhood, I'm going to make it a better place." People like you.

I've had the privilege to see from a national perspective the progress of this initiative over its first three years. I'm constantly struck by the creativity and dedication of the PSN task forces operating in each district. From the local prosecutor to the beat cop to local clergy members and hospital workers, the people involved in PSN have demonstrated a tremendous level of commitment. I've seen impressive ingenuity to overcome obstacles that only a few years ago seemed insurmountable, and I've seen districts celebrate their successes in a true spirit of teamwork and partnership.

Packed into this room here today is a group of dedicated and enthusiastic soldiers in the war on gun crime. Some of you are now veterans, and some of you may be just beginning your tour of duty. In some of your districts, we're clearly winning the war, while in others, we're having to focus on one battle at a time. Take the time to learn from each other – share your successes, of course, but also your mistakes. Here, you'll learn about new ideas, innovative strategies, and novel approaches to implementation. Take these lessons home with you. Try something new. Be inspired by your colleagues who have overcome challenges just like the ones you face today.

I want to thank you for your commitment, for your contribution to Project Safe Neighborhoods. We're winning this fight together – together we need to renew our resolve, maintain our momentum, and even increase our intensity – to make America safe for all of her citizens.

Thank you.